

Root Cause Analysis Activity

Purpose	Root causes are the real causes of our educational problems. We need to find out what they are so we can eliminate the true problem and not just the symptom. The best way to do this is to have staff teams review and analyze data and ask probing questions to uncover the root cause(s).
Target Audience	All staff
Time	One hour
Materials	Demographic, perceptions, school processes, and student achievement data graphs and analyses.
Toolkit Reference	Chapter 4
Process Protocol	<p>Organize small groups in heterogenous groupings. Organize the data graphs and analyses so each small group has all of the different graphs and analyses.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. While reviewing demographic, perceptions, school process, and student achievement data, have team members ask questions about problems they are seeing in the data that will get them to root causes, such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What data are indicating there is a potential problem?• What other indicators are there that might be related, using another piece of data?2. List potential causes of these problems or symptoms.3. Group the causes in an Affinity Diagram or Fishbone (see Group Process Activities on the CD and Chapter 3).4. Have groups report what they are seeing.5. To know if you have uncovered the root cause, ask these questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Would the problem have occurred if the cause had not been present?• Would the problem reoccur if the cause was corrected?<p>If the answer to these questions is <i>no</i>, you have found the root cause. If the answer to these questions is <i>yes</i>, you have probably found a contributing cause, but not the root cause.</p>5. Determine additional data that might need to be collected to know more about the root cause.

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**Comments to
the Facilitator**

Most problems within schools are caused by systems rather than people. Improvement of the system will result in reduction or removal of the problem. Make sure the teams are including processes in their analyses, and make sure they are not jumping to solutions or conclusions prematurely. (For more information on root causes, see *A School Leader's Guide to Root Cause Analysis*, [Paul Preuss, 2000].)